

The Architect as Archivist and Architectural Historian: Laurence Hall Fowler (1876-1971) & the First Maryland Hall of Records

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Illustration 1: Laurence Hall Fowler, courtesy of Special Collections, The Johns Hopkins University

We meet to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the birth of Andrea Palladio (1508-1580). The morning theme was Palladio's passion for precision, order, organization and protection of the built urban world, both his and that of ancient Greece and Rome. This afternoon I would like to turn our attention to a Baltimore architect who was passionate about protecting and preserving the written and visual record of not only the built world, but also the people who inhabited it, especially those who lived in 18th century colonial America. Laurence Hall Fowler is best known for the books he collected and the homes he built, largely for the wealthy of Baltimore. In 1984, the Johns Hopkins Libraries published a catalog of his drawings, *Laurence Hall Fowler, Architect (1876-1971)*, introduced and edited by Egon Verheyen in collaboration with John Ray, Peter Sze, and Michele Taylor. There you will find excellent essays on Fowler's life and training as an architect, with particular emphasis on his private commissions. While mention is made of his public commissions, little is said about how he

diligently applied his acquired knowledge of Palladian influenced architecture, both ancient and 18th century, to the interiors and exteriors of his work, private and public. His collection of pre-1800 architectural books was extensive. He gave them to Johns Hopkins University and, with Elizabeth Baer, published an excellent catalog *The Fowler Architectural Collection of the Johns Hopkins University* in 1961. As a supplement to this essay, the Baer and Fowler catalogue, along with a copy of Isaac Ware's *A Complete Book of Architecture* is available on a text searchable CD for an appropriate donation to the Evergreen Foundation and the Friends of the Maryland State Archives.¹

In all Laurence Hall Fowler accumulated 448 titles which he and Elizabeth Baer meticulously described. Its strength lies in part in the works derived from or related to Palladio. Helen Park cites the collection in her pioneering work on architectural books available in America before the Revolution (1961-1973), as does Nanice G. Schimmelman in *Architectural Books in Early America* (1999). Of the top sixteen titles that Park identifies as having the greatest occurrence in her sources before 1776, Fowler owned six, including Isaac Ware's translation of Palladio's four books, and his *Complete Body of Architecture*.²

In a paper given to the Friends of the Johns Hopkins University Library in February of 1944, Fowler characterized his passion for collecting early works on Architecture:

*One of the apt descriptions I know of a book-collector is Roger North's description of his brother John North. Roger says of John, a bibliophile of the time of Charles the Second, "He courted, as a fond lover, all best editions, fairest characters, best bound and preserved. If the subject was in his favour (as the classics) he care not how many of them he had, even of the same edition, if he thought it among the best, either better bound, squarer cut, neater covers, or some such qualification caught."*³

Fowler went on to define the limits of his own collecting as beginning in Florence in January 1485 with the first printed book on Architecture "De Re Edificatoria" by Leon Battista Alberti, and ending, arbitrarily "during the last years of the eighteenth century when the vigor and originality of the Renaissance inspiration had declined and the season of the "Revival" had set in." Of particular interest to him were the works of Andrea Palladio, "a man of unusual interest for us because of his special influence in the seventeenth and eighteenth century architecture of England, and particularly through Thomas Jefferson, on that of this country."⁴



Illustration 2: from Bert Smith, *Greetings From Baltimore*, 1996, p. 57

Throughout his long career as a Baltimore architect, Laurence Hall Fowler retained an abiding interest in the Palladio influenced architecture of 18th Century America. His commissions for public buildings in particular reflect that tradition. After undergraduate studies at Johns Hopkins where he matriculated in 1898, and a degree in architecture from Columbia University in 1902, he gave up studies in Europe to return to Baltimore, and in 1921 secured his first major

public commission for the war memorial in Baltimore, followed by the Maryland Hall of Records (1932), a colonial style state office building (1938), the refurbishing of the Old Senate Chamber in the State House (1944), and collaborating on the restoration of the Old Treasury building on State Circle, all in Annapolis (1948).⁵

Fowler's obituary in the *Sun* in 1971 headlined "War Memorial Designer is Dead at 94," noting that

"In 1921, his sketch of the War Memorial was selected as the best by the joint city and State Memorial Commission from sketches submitted by prominent architects. Because of the work he did for the War Memorial project, he was named 10 years later to design the Hall of Records [in Annapolis]."⁶

It is in the design and construction of the Memorial Hall of Records on St. John's College Campus in Annapolis that he absorbed and refined to his own purposes the influence of Palladio on the Architecture of the Maryland capital in the third quarter of the 18th century. In the process Fowler became an exemplary archivist before there was such a State position, or even a public archives law.

It didn't hurt Fowler's chances at garnering the commission for a memorial hall of records that he was the son of a respected Maryland judge, and a graduate of Johns Hopkins University, but he did so over some strong opposition from a fellow Baltimore architect, George Callis.



Illustration 3: The Bordley/Randall House, ca. 1868, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives, msa_sc_182_01_479

Fowler was first alerted to the fact that there might be such an archival building in the works by a fellow Hopkins alumnus and prominent Annapolis attorney, Daniel Richard Randall (1864-1936). Randall was the son of a former Attorney General of Maryland, Alexander Randall. He was born and raised just off State Circle in what today is known as the Bordley-Randall House,

an early example of the influence of the Palladio revival in the Capital. Randall began his career as an aspiring historian in the graduate seminar of Herbert Baxter Adams, writing a dissertation on *A Puritan Colony in Maryland* that was published in 1886 in the Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, 4th series, no.6. He abandoned history for the law, however, "lamenting to Adams in 1901 that "the struggle for bread" in the legal profession prevented continued pursuit of historical study."⁷

Randall remained interested in history and was appointed in 1927 by Governor Ritchie (even though he was an active Republican) to a Gubernatorial Commission on celebrating the 300th anniversary of the founding of Maryland in 1934. In June of 1928 Randall wrote a private letter to Fowler giving him advance notice that Fowler would be invited to advise the Commission on appropriate memorials suggest that as much as one million dollars might be set aside for the various projects.

“We each have our special object in view and mine, I do not mind saying, is the erection of a Memorial Hall of Provincial Records to form a member of the State group of buildings [in Annapolis], and to be the future repository from every county in the State and the City of Baltimore of the priceless records that remain unburned and unstollen;”⁸

Randall would later be involved in a high level meeting with the Governor that would define the contract with Fowler, and launch him on his journey to build a model Archives in the envelope of a building carefully crafted to reflect inside and out the Palladio influenced architecture of 18th Century Annapolis.

Rather than become directly involved on the Committee of the Tercentenary Commission to choose an architect for a Memorial Hall of Records, Fowler apparently decided to quietly campaign for the job himself, a process that would take three years and become enmeshed in the fiscal constraints of a deepening depression that at times placed the whole project in serious jeopardy. In fact, only with a substantial grant from the Public Works Administration of President Roosevelt, would the work be completed.

Press support for the creation of State Archives was uniformly positive. *The Evening Sun* in March of 1929, commented that the most important duties of the newly reconstituted Tercentenary Commission was

*“...the erection of a memorial hall in Annapolis for the preservation of all records and historical papers of the State and colony. The collection of records has reached an impressive size and it is none too soon that a home be found for them in a modern, fireproof building, where they will be easily accessible to students. Surely no more permanent way of celebrating the founding of the colony could be devised than the preservation of the original documents that tell the story at first hand...”*⁹

Before the stock market collapse in October of 1929, there was even a generous offer of free land to the State next to the Post Office through the auspices of St. John's College. While this offer would be withdrawn, and would not become the site of the Hall of Records Building, it would later be acquired for Fowler's second major commission in Annapolis, the State Office Building that he, with Henry Powell Hopkins, would design and construct beginning in 1937.¹⁰

St. John's College (Daniel Randall's undergraduate alma mater and seen in the fields beyond Randall's birthplace) was the recipient of State funding, and initially the Western Shore campus of the first University of Maryland. It had also embarked on an ambitious plan of acquiring many of the more prominent 18th century homes in Annapolis, possibly in hopes of Annapolis finding a benefactor such as happened with Williamsburg. Such plans came for naught with the depression, but the State pressured St. John's anyway into providing ground for the proposed Memorial Hall of Records. By December 1931, just prior to the final decision of the Board of Public Works on the choice of an Architect, St. John's President Douglass Gordon wrote Governor Ritchie that he was instructed by the Board of Visitors and Governors of St. Johns College, through an executive Committee that included the influential State Senator Ridgely Melvin, to offer a free site on the campus for the new Memorial Hall of Records for which funding had been appropriated earlier that year.¹¹

The gift proved not to be without qualification, especially with regard to the placement and mass of the building on the campus, which, along with the deepening financial crisis would delay actual construction for another two and a half years.

Pressure to build an Archives for the State came from a number of important public figures, not the least of whom was Chief Judge Carroll T. Bond, who held an honorary doctorate of laws (1924) from Johns Hopkins. In 1928 Bond published a history of the Maryland Court of Appeals and was keenly interested in preserving the records of the Court. In April of 1930 he addressed a "Dear Bert" letter to Governor Ritchie who had appointed him to the court. He offered, along with a select committee that included Daniel Randall, to make a 'survey' of the 'valuables of the State' that would inform a building program for the Memorial Hall of Records. He pointed out to Ritchie that "the only man we could think of who would be sufficiently interested to join is Daniel R. Randall, who was born and spent his life in Annapolis, or most of it, and is a Ph. D. of Johns Hopkins in History, his doctorate thesis having been on the Puritan Settlements about Annapolis in the 1600's. He is a real historian and knows Annapolis. He would also, being a Republican, give a bi-partisan aspect to the thing, for what that may be worth."¹²

Governor Ritchie was slow to answer and Judge Bond would not report on his findings until a year later in February 1931, when based upon assessment of the records the building would have to hold, his committee urged the Governor to provide a capital appropriation of \$250,000. The Governor provided for \$200,000 which was ultimately supplemented by a grant from the Federal Government that brought the total available to about \$260,000.¹³

Once the policy decision was made to go ahead with the building, the next question was who would design it. Initially the Board of Public Works, which consists of the Governor, Treasurer, and Comptroller thought about staging a full AIA sponsored competition, but concluded that the cost of the competition would not leave sufficient funds to build the building. Instead they asked the Baltimore Chapter of the AIA to conduct a secret ballot to choose six Maryland Architects from which Comptroller Gordy would select, once he had evaluated submittals from each. The Chapter's recommendations included Laurence Hall Fowler. The Board of Public Works delegated Comptroller Gordy to review the applications of the finalists. Evidently Fowler had not submitted any evidence of his work on the War Memorial. Gordy specifically asked that photographs be sent for his review which were taken out of office windows overlooking War Memorial Plaza and quickly dispatched.

Clearly there was significant opposition to Fowler getting the Commission, especially from a building committee of the Tercenterary Commission headed by Architect George Callis. Gordy consulted with the Commission before his choice of Fowler was announced. The Commission chairman, William Marbury agreed that it was a good choice, but Callis persisted in his opposition after he had been notified of Fowler's unanimous selection by the Board of Public Works:

I will say however as chairman of the Committee, that I am opposed to Mr. Fowler. Of the six names submitted for consideration by the Institute, I personally could not approve of Mr. Fowler or Mr. Palmer; any one of the other four have the necessary

qualifications and would render excellent service to the State. There are several architects in Maryland that outrank these two men for the faithful execution of the period of architecture we are striving for, and who do not appear on the list. The list as submitted to you, was the result of a friendly popularity contest and I therefore do not take it seriously.

It has been hoped by many with whom I have talked, that the Memorial Hall of Records would establish an architectural precedent for all future buildings of the State group. To do this the architectural lines of the building must be executed with purity of style, eliminating all modernistic tendencies. The very nature and use of this building demands this, as it will house the records of the earliest traditions of Maryland, and vieing only with Virginia and Massachussetts for the earliest records of the birth of the Nation. Its architecture should therefore give expression to this and can only be accomplished by men who possess the scholarly talents of a student of pure Colonial architecture. The men referred to, have demonstrated their inability to be honest in the faithful execution of this most delicate and friendly style of architecture.

My original thought and selection of the man to do this work, was John Russell Pope of New York, who was selected by the Building Committee of John Hopkins University to design their administration building, which will occupy a dominating position in their campus group, and who is an authority on Colonial architecture.

Realizing however, the advantages of a Maryland man, I confined my study to local men and have formed some very definite conclusions.

If this is your final decision however, I must accept the inevitable, but assure you it will dampen my ardor in the work.¹⁴

Governor Ritchie responded with his assessment of the selection process:

I have your favor of February 29th. I am certainly sorry that you do not approve the selection of Laurence Fowler. I cannot think, however, that there is any doubt about his capability.

Mr. Gordy, who has discussed the matter with you, made a very thorough survey of the whole field, and he has no doubt that the great majority of the architects think that Fowler ought to be the man. He is Mr. Gordy's choice and Mr. Dennis's choice; and while any one of a number of people would be agreeable to me, yet I have a very high opinion of Mr. Fowler's work, and feel that no better selection could be made.¹⁵

Finally on April 3, 1932 the selection of Laurence Hall Fowler as Architect for the Memorial Hall of Records in Annapolis was officially announced. Fowler was on his way home from Europe at the time, and on April 14, 1932, he thanked the Board for his appointment.¹⁶

Now the real work would begin. Fowler knew he had two principal objectives to meet: a building that would adequately house and preserve the historical records of the State and one that would represent well the 18th century architectural heritage of Annapolis.

His first problem was to determine how much space would be needed for the records and he began in earnest to learn as much as he could about the current state of professional opinion on the building of an Archives. Fortunately since the early years of the century considerable thought had been given to the care and preservation of historical records under the leadership of the American Historical Association, and, in Maryland, the Maryland Historical Society. Realizing that locally he needed to heed the advice of Judge Bond of the Court of Appeals, and Arthur Trader, Chief Clerk of the Land Office, he also consulted with the Federal authorities that were then in the process of building John Russell Pope's National Archives on the Mall in Washington D.C., and studies that were done for both Indiana and Iowa for

housing their archival treasures. With shelving recommendations from Judge Bond who had passed on the promotional literature from the shelving company that ultimately would build the archival storage units (Snead and Company)¹⁷ he set out to build a building around a core stack area in response to projections of future growth as well as already identified stashes of historical public records at the state and local level. In focusing on the need for proper storage and care of the records, Fowler relied heavily on "A Survey of Storage Conditions

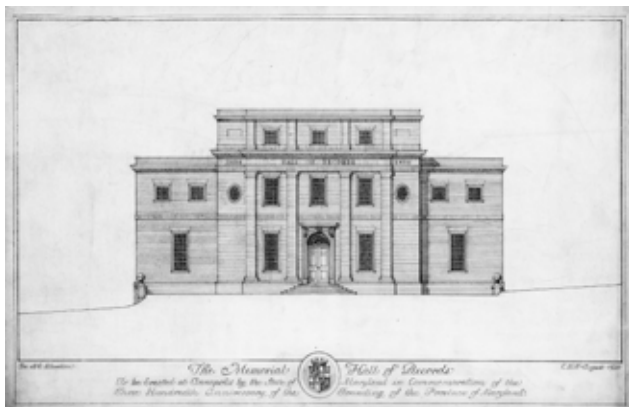


Illustration 4: Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society, MS.370

in Libraries Relative to the Preservation of Records" by Arthur E. Kimberly and J. F. G. Hicks, Jr., published by the Bureau of Standards of the U.S. Department of Commerce in 1931. The thoroughness and passion with which he would later be known for collecting architectural books was evident in Fowler's research notes and the advice he accumulated on preserving and making accessible Maryland's rich archival heritage.

Fowler took great pains to consult everyone who had a working knowledge of the state's records, looking closely at the questions of what work spaces would be needed for accessioning, repair, copying, and use by the public. He concluded that the estimates to date by Judge Bond and the Maryland Historical Society of the amount of space necessary for the historical records was far too conservative. By July 1932, he and the Chief Clerk of the Land Office who would share the building with the as yet unidentified archival staff, concluded that at minimum 139,104 cubic feet of dense stack space would be needed, enveloped by spaces of nearly equal size to accommodate the archival and land office programs. To support the collective wisdom of how the building should function he wrote a program for the administrative spaces to be allocated to the as yet non-existent archival staff. Of particular interest to the current state archivist is Fowler's description of the proposed office of the Archivist:

“It is desirable that this office should be so located that the archivist may be free from constant interruption, though accessible to those having definite business with him. Also it should have access both to the stacks and to the research room &, to some extent should overlook the latter. There should be intercommunicating telephone...., a bell, or other signaling device, to offices of assistant archivist and secretary. Equipment should include desk, chairs, table, bookshelves, files, safe and closets or lockers.” Ultimately it would even include a private bathroom and an round window from the office that looked down on the large two-story space of the search room that could be opened for instant communication.¹⁸

St. John's was unhappy with both the orientation and the proposed mass of the building. Fowler agreed to turn the building in towards the campus instead of facing it on St. John's street with its back to the campus, and he reluctantly worked to reduce its overall mass, but not before he attempted to persuade the St. John's Board to accept the larger building. At a meeting of the Board of Public Works on September 1, 1932 which was attended by Fowler, Gordy, Daniel Randall, and the Governor's key budget advisor, Walter Kirkman, Fowler's revised plans and draft program for the use of the building were approved for submittal to St. Johns.¹⁹ St. Johns was content with the reorientation of the building but still insisted that the mass of the building had to be further reduced. Fowler went back to the drawing board.

In the process of meeting the demands of the College to reduce the mass of the building he was not able to provide all the space he felt the records required. Instead of the 139,104 cubic feet he felt certain was needed, he was only able to provide about 96,000 cubic feet, a 30% reduction. His initial projections of need were conservative at best and the imposed reductions did not bode well for the future. Less than twenty years later the building would be bursting to capacity. It would not be until 1986 that a new Maryland Hall of Records would be built to adequately accommodate the permanent public records of the State, and even then for only twenty years.

The earliest surviving drawings of the Memorial Hall of Records show the large building facing inward on the campus. After considerable effort and negotiation, his final drawings

showing the reduced mass were presented to the College in January of 1933.²⁰ Governor Ritchie sent Fowler a sympathetic letter indicating that he looked forward to seeing the revised plans as approved by the College. He had been advised by Senator Ridgely Melvin (sponsor of the Bond bill) “that the Hall of Records situation had about been worked out. I would like to see the revised plans after they have been finally approved by the St. John's committee, but I do not think you need be afraid of any suggestions



Illustration 5: Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society, MS.370



Illustration 6: Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society, MS.370

from me. I expect you have had more than enough already.”²¹

All that was needed now was for the bonds to be sold to pay for the building and for Fowler to prepare the bid drawings and documents. That would take a few months and two sets of bids. The State’s finances were in a precarious position and state revenues were down. Ritchie was forced to order considerable reductions in state spending and personnel and the Board of Public Works could not see its way clear to approve commencing construction until 1934. In the meantime Fowler had to consider laying

off his draftsmen and his work on designing the interior furnishing for the building was put on hold, although he went ahead with bid documents for construction, issuing specifications in October 1933.²² His bid drawings show considerable attention to 18th century era detailing and in some respects resemble clearly their Palladio and 18th century English counterparts.

As to exterior architectural detail, Fowler had a definite 18th century model in mind, one that can be directly linked to the Americanization of Palladio. While he regretted not being able to use the pediment which is such an essential Palladio design element, he turned to a well-known 18th century home for the design of the front facade and window treatment. In reflecting on the lack of a pediment he wrote that “in its final form, the mass of the structure was largely determined by the necessity for it to appear as small as possible; it was therefore given a flat roof, in this respect following an English rather than the American precedent.”²³

In the text for an illustrated presentation on the overall design which he apparently presented to the Maryland Historical Society, Fowler explained his rationale for the modifications he made to the traditional elements of 18th century architecture, the reasons for its final size, and his desire to reflect the best he could offer in a modern archival storage facility run by a model archival program:

“In its final form ... the general design of the building was largely determined by the necessity of appearing as small as possible. The compact arrangement of the interior; the broken mass



Illustration 7: The rear facade of the Hammond Harwood House and the front facade of the first Maryland Hall of Records, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives

of the exterior, and the use of a concealed instead of a visible roof were intended to achieve that end. While buildings with concealed roofs are not characteristic of the colonial period, they were not unknown to colonial architects, as examples of such treatment occur in the contemporary books from which they derived much of their inspiration. Several of these old volumes, with their fine copper plates, I have found actually very useful in developing my design in the eighteenth century tradition.”²⁴

When Fowler turned his attention to the interior spaces, it became the places where he would reflect the best of what he thought were the finest architectural details of 18th century Annapolis architecture. In doing so Fowler returned to his copper plates, and his own measured drawings of interior spaces of the most prominent of the 18th century Annapolis townhouses.

Probably the best known 18th century building in Annapolis outside of the State House in Fowler’s day was the “Matthias Hammond House” (now known as the Hammond-Harwood House) which had been featured in a 1929 White Pine Monograph with text by Effingham C. Desmond and photographs by Kenneth Clark.²⁵ Fowler modeled his facade on the rear of the House and the entrance on the front portico. As to the interior spaces, he had in mind other buildings where he would find inspiration and an opportunity to capture elements in detailed drawings.

With the Hammond Harwood House and its builder, William Buckland, there is an immediate and direct link to the inspirational works of Palladio and the Palladio Revolution attributed to Lord Burlington and the proponents of Palladio such as Isaac Ware. The

influence that movement on American architecture of the 18th century is amply documented in James Kornwolf’s massive 3 volume work on *Architecture and Town Planning in Colonial America*.²⁶



Illustration 8: The front facade of the Hammond Harwood House, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives

As to William Buckland, there is the 1789 portrait by Charles Willson Peale, and his estate inventory of 1777 (he died in 1774 before completion of Hammond-Harwood house.) Peale’s portrait pays tribute to the pediment and portico of Palladio’s influence (if inaccurately with five columns), as well as sketches of a town house that may well be Hammond-Harwood, although Buckland contributed to the design of a number of others in Maryland and Virginia including Strawberry Hill just outside Annapolis.

Buckland’s inventory is transcribed by Rosamand Randall Beirne, and John H. Scarff (the latter one of Fowler’s rivals as an authority on 18th Century Maryland architecture) in their biography.²⁷



Illustration 9: Charles Willson Peale (American, 1741–1827)
William Buckland (1734–1774), 1774 and 1789
Oil on canvas, 27 1/2 x 36 5/8 in. (69.9 x 93 cm)
Mabel Brady Garvan Collection
1934.303, Courtesy of Yale University Art Collection
on line at http://artgallery.yale.edu/pages/collection/popups/pc_amerps/enlarge06.html

The Buckland inventory lists 16 works on architecture, carpentry, and building instructions.²⁸ Among them are five major works by Ware, Gibbs, Swans, and Hoppus that would also find their way into Laurence Hall Fowler's collection. One that seems to have been heavily consulted by Annapolis carpenters and builders was Isaac Ware's *Complete Architect* with its more than 140 copper plates. Ware was also a translator of Palladio and produced the standard English translation of his *Four books on Architecture* until it was superseded in 1997 by Robert Tavernor and Richard Schonfield's new translation which they accompanied by facsimiles of the original woodcuts. Travenor in *Palladio and Palladianism* suggests that Ware's work was not as widely consulted in England, and that the works of Gibbs and Morris would more apt to be consulted in America. In fact Roger Morris's design for a house based on Marble Hill, from an *Essay on Defence of Ancient Architecture* bears in some aspects a striking resemblance to elements of the facade of Fowler's Hall of

Records, and Tavernor clearly documents Morris' influence in Virginia, but Buckland did not own a copy of Morris, although he did own Gibbs. Whatever direct influences there were on Buckland's design for Hammond-Harwood house, however, there is no question that he influenced Fowler.²⁹

In 1934, when actual construction of the Hall of Records was underway, Fowler turned his attention to the interior of the Hammond -Harwood House, as well as to the Brice House, the Upton Scott House, and Whitehall plantation to take measured drawings of furnishings and transformed them into the chairs and tables for the public spaces and offices to compliment the architectural details of the rooms they occupied.

Overall his careful drawings for the wood working contractor and the furniture maker, both based in Baltimore, are evocative of the interiors of all the 18th century houses that he sketched in the summer of 1934. In some respects the most striking is the archway approach to the staircase to the second floor and the staircase itself which is patterned after the Upton Scott House, but he was also clearly inspired by the interiors of the Hammond and Brice Houses.

The last, the Brice House, is another example of the direct influence of the English treatises on architecture. From the exhaustive work of Orlando Ridout we know that the owner/builder, James Brice "paid L2/8 for Isaac Ware's *The Complete Body of Architecture* through his London factor," which in turn he lent to John Shaw, Master Cabinet Maker and long time Clerk of the

Apparatus of drawing papers	16
House of Mathematical Instruments	2
Sketch of History of Quality	12
1740 Turkish City	1. 10
House Designs	2
Gibbs Designs	2
James Architects	12
Thomas Gordon's Art	1
Langley's Designs	10
Sketch of Turkish Designs	6
Henry Shipwrights	1
Light House Designs	8
Langley's Gothic Architecture	6
Epitome	1
Robertson's Designs	10
Johnson's Designs	2
Hoppus's Designs	1
Swans's Designs	1
Swans's Designs	1
Swans's Designs	4
Swans's Designs	1
Swans's Designs	12
Swans's Designs	12

Illustration 10: Detail from William Buckland's inventory listing his architectural books, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives

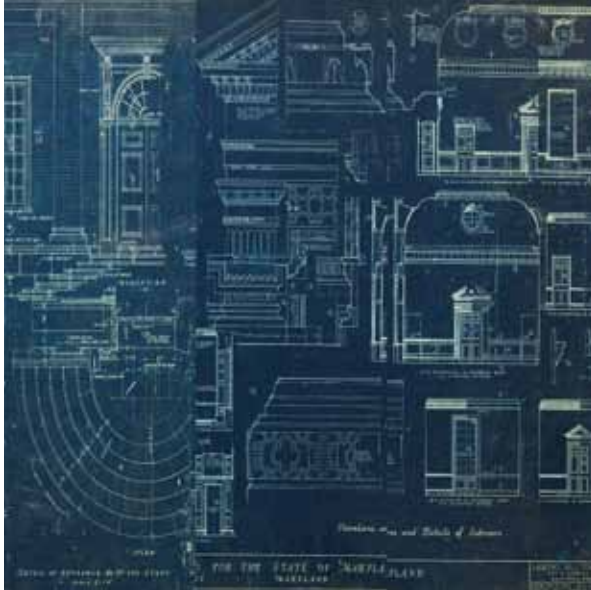


Illustration 11: details from original as built blueprints of the exterior and interior details of the first Maryland Hall of Records, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives

Works of the Maryland State House. To be fair, Ridout makes it clear that the heaviest reliance for detail and overall design for both the Brice House and Hammond-Harwood House was James Gibbs volumes, *A Book of Architecture* (London, 1728) and *Rules for the Drawing the Several Parts of Architecture* (London, 1732), the former of which is also found in Fowler's library and in Buckland's inventory.³⁰

Construction on the Hall of Records progressed apace from the summer of 1934 to June of 1935. There were the usual Architect/contractor quarrels over change orders including who should pay for the heating of the building to cure the plaster, and more comfortable chairs for the Land Office (Fowler personally designed all the furniture in the traditions of the 18th century).

The building was finished for delivery to the State by the summer of 1935. The State had built an Archives combining modern methods of storage and management within an 18th century setting, but when the doors opened there were no archivists, only employees of the land office, and no records except those of the Court of Appeals and the Land Office. Governor Ritchie was no longer in office having been defeated by the man who fifteen years before he had beaten by only a handful of votes.

In a lecture given several months before the completion of the building Fowler addressed his audience on the need for a department of Archives and a professional archival staff for the new Hall of Records:

He outlined three fundamental principles of archives,

1. proper atmospheric and lighting conditions,
2. the dual responsibilities of proper preparation and classification, noting that "Archivists are almost unanimous in their support of the principle of classification known as the



Illustration 12: Interior staircase of the first Maryland Hall of Records with its as built blueprint, followed by an interior photograph of the staircase at the Upton Scott House, Annapolis, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives



Illustration 13: The Brice House, Annapolis with photograph of interior door, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives

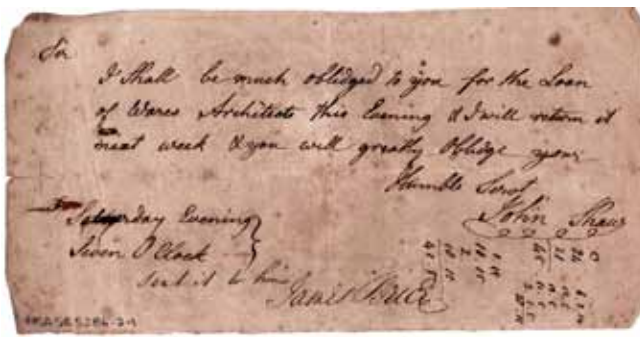


Illustration 14: John Shaw to James Brice, receipt for Ware's Architect, msa_sc5286_2_1

“respect des fonds,” which one authority defines to be ‘the grouping of records so that the processes by which they have come into existence are at once made clear’

3. archives should be in the care of officials trained for their work both in theory and practice. The archivist’s training is different from that of the librarian; the archivists should canvas the historical resources of the state, locating

and listing material, both in public depositories and private possession, [reaching out to] cooperate with local authorities to insure the preservation of their records, advising as to the best papers and inks, as well as suggesting methods of indexing

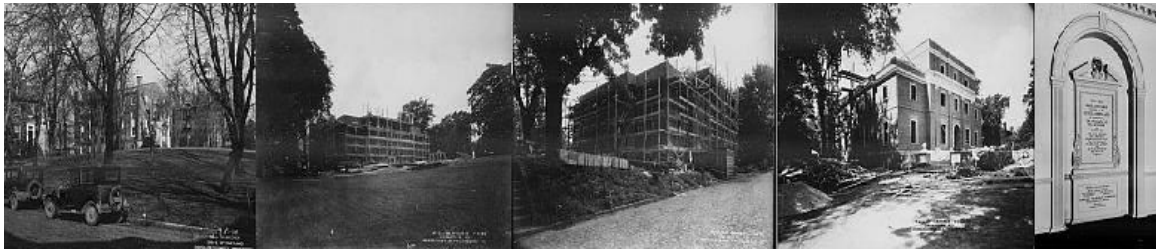


Illustration 15: Photographs of the process of building the First Maryland Hall of Records on St. John's College Campus, Annapolis, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives.

He concluded by observing that “such a department of records as I have outlined cannot, of course, be brought into existence all at once, it must be built up gradually and with care. But its ultimate development had to be anticipated in order that adequate accommodations might be provided.... The responsibility for continuing this work, for arousing public interest, for procuring the necessary legislation, rests with [the audience] and others like you, who are alive to its urgency. It has been aptly said that ‘ the care with which a people devotes to the preservation of the monuments of its past, may serve as a measure of the degree of civilization to which it has attained.’”³¹

The Legislature and the new governor did follow Fowler’s and Judge Bond’s advice that there needed to be a governing commission for the building and an archival staff. A law was passed effective March 27, 1935, but with no appropriation until October. It established a Hall of Records Commission with Judge Bond elected as it’s first chairman, and included provisions that ensured the development of a reasonable archival policy for the care and preservation of the permanent records that had been the rationale for the building in the first place. As Dr. Radoff, the third person to direct the Maryland Archives summarized in his pioneering work on the history of public buildings in Annapolis,

On March 7, 1934, the first spade full of earth was turned by State Senator Ridgely P. Melvin of Anne Arundel County, who had sponsored the bill providing funds for the Hall of Records. The building was completed one

year later, and it was occupied by the Land Office in June 1935 and by the [newly created] Hall of Records Commission on October 1, 1935 [with the arrival of the first State Archivist, Dr. James Robertson].³²

The 300th anniversary of the founding of Maryland had been missed by over a year, but no mind. James Robertson, followed by Elizabeth Meade and Morris Radoff, brought the distinction to the Archival program that the building deserved, and Laurence Hall Fowler turned his attention to securing his next state contract in Annapolis, the new State Office Building that was to be constructed on the very land that originally had been offered gratis for a much larger envisioned Hall of Records. He secured the contract and went on, with Henry Powell Hopkins to refurbish the old Senate Chamber in the State House and restore the Old Treasury building on the State House grounds.

In 1936 Fowler published a well illustrated article on his achievement in *The Architectural Record*, the images of which follow:





HALL OF RECORDS

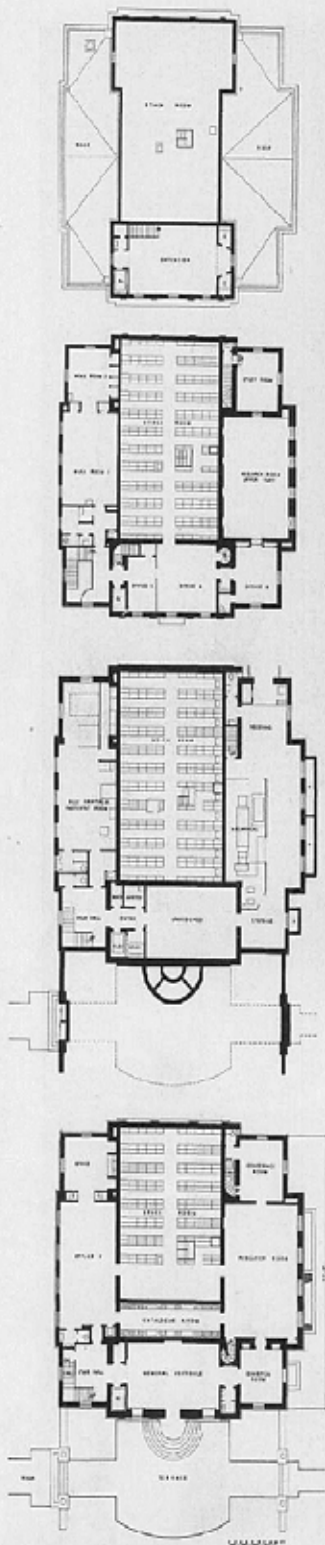
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

The Hall of Records at Annapolis was erected by the State of Maryland to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of the founding of the province. Two hundred thousand dollars had been appropriated by the legislature for the construction and equipment of a building to house, and make available for research, all surviving documents pertaining to the history of the state; and a site had been provided at the southwest end of the campus of St. John's College.

This site, by its very nature, offered a number of problems. The campus, a tree-shaded green measuring 250' x 800', is bordered on one of its long sides by a street—College Avenue—and on the other by a row of five brick buildings dating roughly from the middle of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th, the central building (the oldest and largest) having a hip roof crowned by a cupola. At right angles to this row, closing one end of the college campus, stands the dignified little college library, designed in the Georgian manner by T. Henry Randall thirty-five years ago. The site designated for the Hall of Records, at the other end of the college campus, naturally called for a structure somewhat similar in size and position, to take its place as one of the college group and, indeed, a condition actually attached to the use of the site required that the building to be erected there should have its principal façade and entrance facing the campus. While the sloping grade of the site made this condition somewhat troublesome, a greater difficulty was caused by the fact that the building, being for state rather than for college use, had to be readily accessible to the general public. Therefore the main approach, a brick walk, had to come from College Avenue at the side, instead of from the campus in front. However, greatest of all

LAURENCE H. FOWLER

ARCHITECT



the problems presented by the site was that of size. The minimum requirements for the Hall of Records called for a building having a cubic content considerably greater than that of any other building on the campus. It became necessary, therefore, to arrive at some design which should be large enough to meet these minimum requirements, while still appearing small enough to take its proper place among the other less extensive buildings of the group. In its final form, the mass of the structure was largely determined by the necessity for it to appear as small as possible; it was therefore given a flat roof, in this respect following an English rather than the American precedent.

The construction is fireproof: brick bearing walls, steel girders, and reinforced concrete floor and roof slabs. The specially hand-made face brick—a reproduction in size, color and texture of the Annapolis Colonial brick—is laid, with tight joints, in Flemish bond. The steps, and the coping and finials of the terrace walls, are of white marble. The cornices, window frames and sash, and the entrance door are of wood, while parts particularly subject to deterioration, such as copings, window sills, and the capitals and bases of the pilasters, are of limestone; but wood and limestone alike are finished to give a uniform white painted surface.

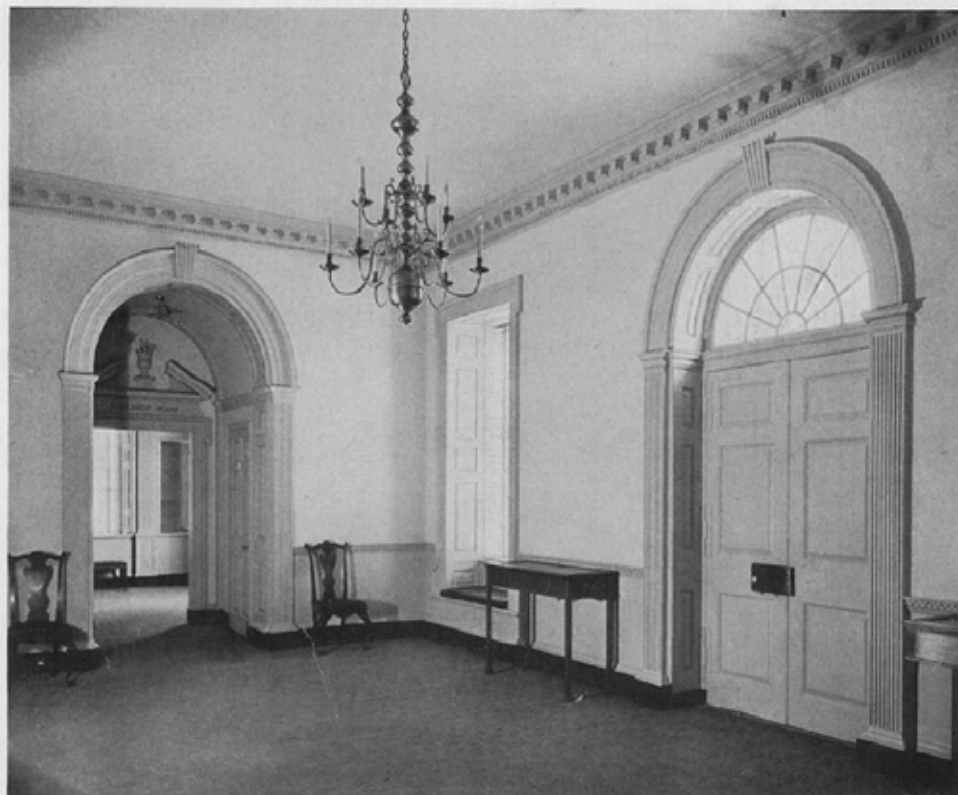
Exclusive of professional fees, the building cost 60 cents a cubic foot. This includes furniture and all equipment except the apparatus for photographic reproduction.



**HALL OF RECORDS
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND**

LAURENCE H. FOWLER
ARCHITECT

Opposite: Research room,
Right: Room for extension work,
Below: Memorial vestibule.



It is only fitting that as we celebrate the life, times and influence of Andrea Palladio by recognizing that a great admirer and collector of his works, was a practicing architect himself who learned to be an archivist merging the best of what he saw in the American Palladio tradition with the nascent science of Archives in order to provide a safe and secure home for a precious archival heritage. As he found out early on in his quest for the commission, he could not do all that he wanted to do. Even at the last minute his tasteful design for the memorial plaque in the vestibule was threatened with a modernistic bronze travesty that would have marred the whole entrance hall. Because the State had accepted a Federal grant to finish the building, recently adopted specifications required that any building constructed in whole or in part with Federal funds should conspicuously mount an ugly brass plaque of modern design.³³

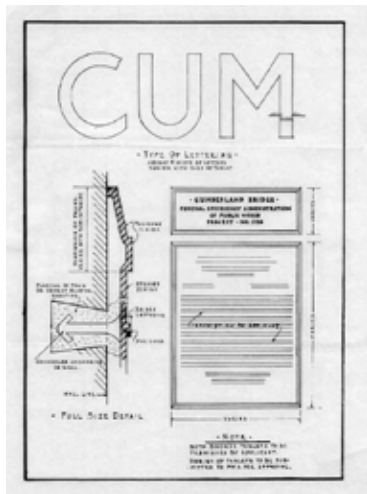


Illustration 16: The bronze plaque format required for any building or bridge constructed with Federal Funds during the Depression,

Fortunately Comptroller Gordy on behalf of the Board of Public Works was able to convince the Public Works Administration that the rule did not apply to the Hall of Records, which was dutifully acknowledged in classic bureaucratese³⁴:

*The last paragraph of our Bulletin of January 17, ... states that the placing of tablets is not retroactive to the extent of compelling compliance on projects, which have been fully completed to date, and it will not be necessary to install P.W.A. tablets on this project unless you so desire.*³⁵

Instead the original design was installed in the main entry way, carved in wood with lettering modeled on the type font of the

colonial newspaper the Maryland Gazette, published by Anne Catherine Green, Printer to the Colony. The only omission was the word 'Memorial' in deference to former Governor Ritchie who, shortly after he lost the gubernatorial election in November 1934, wrote that he felt it "commemorated someone who is dead."³⁶

In all Fowler could take great pride in his work. He had built a model Archives *that cost less than* Judge Bond's original estimate of \$250,000, and did so according to schedule, before there was even an archival program or a professional archivist to take charge. In all the building cost \$221,206.45 out of the \$260,251.71 appropriated. Just as it was being completed, Governor Ritchie, a major force behind the project, lost the general election.



Illustration 17: Final version of the dedicatory plaque for the first Maryland Hall of Records, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives

If Ritchie had lived (he died in 1936)³⁷, perhaps he would have taken solace in the fact that his successor would lose the next election because instead of allocating the surplus from building the Hall of Records to much needed accessories and additional furnishings, he



Illustration 18: Government House with the Fowler office building behind and the colonial revival post office behind and to the left, courtesy of the Maryland State Archives,

had the remaining \$39,045.07 quietly moved to the conversion of the Victorian governor's mansion to a colonial style Georgian townhouse with a distinctive Palladio window. The whole exercise in reconstructing government house was considered a waste of public money in the midst of a depression, and helped end Governor Nice's political career. Laurence Hall Fowler was not the architect of the reconstructed Government House, but in the State building seen behind Government House in this photograph, he and Henry Powell Hopkins were able to attend to the Palladio detail of pediment and portico. Nor did Fowler have anything

to do with the building to the left of his office building. The classic Palladio windows and corner treatments of stone in the neighboring post office to the left date from much earlier in the century when Federal monies were available to lavish on such colonial revival structures.

In sum, not only are we indebted to Fowler for his great collection of architectural treatises. He deserves to be remembered as the Architect who became an archivist, and an architectural historian in the footsteps of Palladio, who used his talents to enhance our ability to better understand and appreciate the past through his vision of what an Archives of Maryland in form and substance ought to be. In the last years of his life, Fowler rightfully began to worry about the wholesale destruction of the built environment by Baltimore city planners and others lacking his appreciation of the past. As he watched his city lose some of the best architecture of its past, he began his own photographic archives, which he in turn gave to the Johns Hopkins University. In 2002 an extensive collection of nitrate negatives were re-discovered among his papers at Evergreen House, and brought to the web with a grant from the Sheridan foundation at a Johns Hopkins Library web site, Laurence Hall Fowler's Lost Baltimore. Fowler the archivist and architectural historian, closed out his long and productive life as a creator of archives, as well as protector and architect/interpreter of the past.³⁸ Sadly, many of his private commissions have been destroyed, leaving us only the paper and photographic record to remind us of his skill. Even his greatest public commission, the first Maryland Hall of Records has been altered to the point that it surely would have saddened, if not angered him. Still, he has left his books and his private papers in the hands of a caring and responsible repository. His state contracts are now documented on line at the Maryland State Archives. He has made it possible through his collections and his surviving buildings for us to learn from the past, and, above all, in keeping with this conference, better appreciate the influence, life, and work of Andrea Palladio.

Endnotes

- 1 The cd is available from the Maryland State Archives (call 410-260-6401, or consult the publications section of the Maryland State Archives web site, <http://mdsa.net>), and at Evergreen House for a donation of \$40, the proceeds of which will be equally divided between the Evergreen House Foundation and the Friends of the Maryland State Archives. A copy of this essay will also be found on the CD. For Fowler's life see also his biography on line at: <http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/014800/014895/html/msa14895.html> (accessed 6/15/2009; user name and password of *aaco/aaco#* required).
- 2 Park, Helen. *A List of Architectural Books Available in America before the Revolution*. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1973; Schimmelman, Janice. *Architectural Books in Early America*. New Castle: Oak Knoll Press, 1999.
- 3 Fowler, Laurence Hall. "Some Early Architectural Books: An Address to the Friends of the Library, Johns Hopkins University, February 17, 1944," 18 pp. Unpublished, copy courtesy of Special Collections, The Johns Hopkins University Library,
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Verheyen, Egon, ed. In collaboration with John Ray, Peter Sze and Michele Taylor. *Laurence Hall Fowler, Architect (1876-1971), A Catalogue of Drawings from the Milton S. Eisenhower Library of the Johns Hopkins University*. Baltimore, 1984.
- 6 "War Memorial's Designer Is Dead At 94." *The Baltimore Sun*, 13 June 1971.
- 7 Gittleman, Marvin E. *The Johns Hopkins University Seminary of History and Politics*, volume 5, Garland, 1990, p. 76.
- 8 http://mdhistory.net/ebook/mdsa_sc5458_000045_000369/mdsa_sc1103_m002203/tif/html/mdsa_sc1103_m002203-0171.html (last accessed 2009/06/16)
- 9 GOVERNOR (General File) 1920-1935, Hall of Records, MdHR 8054-31, msa_si041_422.
- 10 Dr. James Bordley to Governor Ritchie, July 29, 1929, GOVERNOR (General File) 1920-1935, Hall of Records, MdHR 8054-31, msa_si041_422.
- 11 BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS (General File) 1931-1934, Hall of Records, MdHR 16,376-49, msa_s42_130, pdf, 11.
- 12 GOVERNOR (General File) 1920-1935, Hall of Records, MdHR 8054-31, msa_si041_422, selections pdf, 3.
- 13 <http://aomol.net/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000580/html/am580--680.html> (accessed 6/15/2009)
- 14 GOVERNOR (General File) 1920-1935, Hall of Records, MdHR 8054-31, msa_si041_422.
- 15 GOVERNOR (General File) 1920-1935, Hall of Records, MdHR 8054-31, msa_si041_422, selections pdf, 307.

- 16 GOVERNOR (General File) 1920-1935, Hall of Records, MdHR 8054-31, msa_s1041_422.
- 17 http://mdhistory.net/ebook/mdsa_sc5458_000045_000369/mdsa_sc1103_m002203/tif/html/mdsa_sc1103_m002203-1111.html
- 18 msa_sc1104, "Specifications for the Hall of Records," copy no. 43.
- 19 BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS (General File) 1931-1934, Hall of Records, MdHR 16,376-49, msa_s42_130, pdf, (BPW 1:85/409)
- 20 BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS (General File) 1931-1934, Hall of Records, MdHR 16,376-49, msa_s42_130, pdf, (BPW 1:90/409).
- 21 BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS (General File) 1931-1934, Hall of Records, MdHR 16,376-49, msa_s42_130, pdf, (BPW 1:91/409).
- 22 msa_sc1104, "Specifications for the Hall of Records," copy no. 43.
- 23 <http://www.msa.md.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000441/html/am441--13.html>
- 24 For this and the other quotes from the governor's papers and the records of the Maryland Board of Public Works, see a sample of the original papers from the Maryland State Archives on line at: http://mdhistory.net/ebook/mdsa_sc5458_000045_000369/mdsa_sc1103_m002203/tif/html/mdsa_sc1103_m002203-0071.html and as explained in the ebook introduction at: <http://mdhistory.net/ebook/html/index.html>.
- 25 Reprinted as *Early American Southern Homes, Vol VIII in the Architectural Treasures of Early America Series*, Lisa C. Mullins, Ed., The National Historical Society: Harrisburg, Pa., 1987.
- 26 *The Treasure Houses of Britain. Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 214, and James D. Kornwolf, *Architecture and Town Planning in Colonial North America*, 3 vols., Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.
- 27 Beirne, Rosamond Randall and John Henry Scarff, *William Buckland 1734-1774 Architect of Virginia and Maryland*. Baltimore: The Maryland Historical Society, 1958.
- 28 PREROGATIVE COURT (Testamentary Papers) Original Inventory and Account of William Buckland, Box 83, Folder 41, MdHR 331-83-41 [MSA S541-92, 1/13/1/44]
- 29 Travenor, Robert and Richard Schofield, translators. *Andrea Palladio. The Four Books on Architecture*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997.
- 30 msa_sc5286_2_1; "Building the Col. James Brice House, Annapolis" by Orlando Ridout IV
- 31 Fowler's lecture, http://mdhistory.net/ebook/mdsa_sc5458_000045_000369/mdsa_sc1103_m002203/tif/html/mdsa_sc1103_m002203-0070.html
- 32 Radoff, Morris L. *Buildings of the State of Maryland at Annapolis*. Annapolis: The Hall of Records Commission, 1954, pp. 127-129.
- 33 GOVERNOR (General File) 1920-1935, Hall of Records, MdHR 8054-31, msa_s1041_422, folder 30.

- 34 bureaucrats. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc.<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/bureaucrats> (accessed: June 15, 2009).
- 35 GOVERNOR (General File) 1920-1935, Hall of Records, MdHR 8054-31, msa_S1041_422
- 36 GOVERNOR (General File) 1920-1935, Hall of Records, MdHR 8054-31, msa_S1041_422.
- 37 For a biography of Governor Ritchie, see:
<http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/001400/001480/html/msa01480.html> and
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Ritchie.
- 38 The principal collection of Laurence Hall Fowler papers is at Evergreen, and has been carefully catalogued with a finding aid on line at <http://www.library.jhu.edu/collections/specialcollections/manuscripts/msregisters/ms413.html> (last accessed 6/15/2009). There are extensive plans, drawings, specifications, and correspondence relating to his State commissions at the Maryland State Archives. See the citations throughout this essay and the introduction to the on-line compilation at:
<http://www.library.jhu.edu/collections/specialcollections/fowler/index.html> (accessed 2009/06/15)
The old Peale/Baltimore City Life Museum once had a collection of Fowler drawings and photographs relating to the Baltimore City War Memorial commission which presumably have been incorporated into the Fowler collections at the Maryland Historical Society. The latter include the original watercolors and pen and ink renderings of the proposed Maryland Hall of Records that are illustrated here (see: especially MS. 1876.3 , and MS.370, the latter containing the renderings).